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CIA director George Bush tells newspaper editors about his recent secret fact-finding mission. (UPI)

Bush tells editors of secret mission

By Rachelle Patterson
Globe Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Central Intelligence director George Bush yesterday disclosed to a meeting of editors that he has recently been on a secret mission to three foreign countries.

Speaking to a luncheon meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Bush said he was on a fact-finding tour, but he later declined to identify which countries were visited or when. However one report said Bush had been in Europe.

Bush strongly defended the need for protecting government secrets and sources but admitted there is an "overclassification" problem now.

Bush said he was "disappointed" to read a Boston Globe report of a private meeting he held with Frank Sinatra, long under surveillance by the Justice Department and other government agencies for his ties to the Mafia and his relationship with President John F. Kennedy.

Jonathan Bush, George's brother, told The Globe that Sinatra offered the CIA his services during a meeting with the director, his brother and others at Jonathan's New York apartment in February. George Bush had no comment when asked about the offer yesterday.

Asked about the extent to which the CIA uses entertainers in its intelligence gathering, Bush said he didn't know but "if any American wants to volunteer, he would be welcome."

Jonathan Bush told The Globe that "Sinatra said he was always flying around the world, and meeting with people like the Shah of Iran and the royal family of Great Britain. He emphasized time and again that his services were available and that he wanted to do his part for his country."

(Yesterday there was no direct comment from Sinatra, but United Press International reported that his publicists in Los Angeles quoted him as saying: "I also offered to be the heir of Howard Hughes — but evidently he turned me down.")

Because of criticism of the CIA over the past two years following press disclosures and congressional investigations into CIA abuses, Bush said morale could be better.

But, he said, the number of applicants for agency positions has increased as well as the quality of the applicants.

(Although Bush would not reveal where he went on his secret mission, UPI quoted a CIA spokesman as saying later that "He said Europe," without specifying Western or Eastern Europe.)

In other matters, Bush was asked about the release of names of American reporters who in 1973 former CIA director William Colby said were on the agency's payroll. Bush said he would not reveal the names and if a "news person wants to cooperate he should be able to do so."

Bush said he is mandated to protect sources and methods used by the agency. He would not comment on any existing relationship between the CIA and foreign journalists.

Asked about an off-the-record briefing the CIA

recently gave to science reporters, one of whom reported it was divulged that Israel has a stock of some dozen atomic bombs, Bush said he "took the responsibility for that." He said those who divulged the information had been reprimanded, but refused to say whether the reprimand led to disciplinary action.

Also at the editors' meeting yesterday news executives challenged reports that three presidential candidates did not receive ample notice on Wednesday that a Federal Judge had ordered pickets removed from the Shoreham Hotel where they were due to appear for a question-and-answer session.

Boston Globe editor Thomas Winship, moderator for the candidates' panel, said, "I and three other editors were on an open line to the Federal court at 9 a.m. when we received the news of the order. We then notified the staffs of all three candidates immediately."

The panel had been scheduled for 10 a.m. The candidates, Jimmy Carter, Henry M. Jackson and Morris K. Udall, refused to attend the session after hearing it was being picketed by members of the National Assn. of Broadcast Employees and Technicians. The union is engaged in a strike against NBC. The union members, who obeyed the court order and left the hotel, were protesting NBC's scheduled news coverage of the event.